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Another Week | Another Tool: A Digital Humanities Barn Raising

In 2010, the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media gathered twelve digital humanists of different stripes – developers, professors, designers, managers – for One Week | One Tool, A Digital Humanities Barn Raising. The goal was to conceive of, produce, and market a new digital humanities tool. The result was Anthologize, a WordPress plugin for publishing WordPress content to PDF, EPUB, and other forms.

Following that success, RRCHNM attempted to recreate the experience with twelve different digital humanists, again from many different fields and backgrounds. Drawing on lessons learned from the first iteration, we put more emphasis on project management strategies and reduced the amount of time devoted to instruction in digital humanities tools and methods. The tool they produced is a Software as a Service application, Serendip-o-Matic, which allows users to enter text or their Zotero library and discover unexpectedly similar results in DPLA, Europeana, and other sources.

In what follows, we hope that you will find insights and perspectives about the experience that will provide inspiration for other innovative programs, project management considerations, and digital humanities practices in general.

The Another Week | Another Tool team was:

Brian Croxall. Digital Humanities Specialist and Lecturer in English, Emory University

Jack Dougherty. Associate Professor and Director of Educational Studies, Trinity College

Meghan Frazer. Digital Resources Curator, The Ohio State University

Scott Kleinman. Professor of English, California State University

Rebecca Sutton Koeser. Software Engineer, Emory University Libraries

Ray Palin. Teacher and Librarian, Sunapee Middle High School

Amy Papaelias. Assistant Professor of Graphic Design and Foundation, SUNY

Mia Ridge. Ph.D. candidate in Digital Humanities, Open University

Eli Rose. Undergraduate student, Oberlin University

Amanda Visconti. Ph.D. candidate in English, University of Maryland

Scott Williams. Collections Database Administrator, Univ of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

Amrys Williams. Postdoctoral Fellow, National Museum of American History

The second iteration of One Week | One Tool was an extremely successful experience for the participants' professional development, instruction in digital humanities methods, and experience in collaboration with a variety of people in different roles. The results differ from the first iteration, very much following the changes RRCHNM implemented between the two events. In particular, this iteration's emphasis on a project management team led to several participants citing learning about project management structures as their most important takeaway from the experience. The product, the software-as-a-service application, Serendip-o-matic, continues online, though with fairly minimal traffic. The reach of the experience to affect other digital humanists' thinking has been extraordinary, taking the forms of a long session presentation at Digital Humanities 2014, and a post for ACRL's TechConnect series, among other successful informal and formal papers and presentations.

Project Activities, Accomplishments, and Audiences

The One Week | One Tool team coalesced into a group that quickly self-selected into distinct teams with clear leaders: the development team, the outreach team, and the project management team. This division, particularly within the development team, reflects the inroads that project management techniques, particularly Agile, have made into digital humanities. Mia Ridge became the "Scrum Master" of the development team, coordinating the teams activities and priorities. Meghan Frazer and Brian Croxall, the project management team, took on the role of coordinating between the the development and outreach teams. At times this was a controlled chaos, as sometimes within the course of a single day the realities of what could be built and the expectations of the outreach team would diverge. This was to be expected in such a condensed product launch time, and provided valuable experience for all participants, some of whom had not worked within anything analogous to the project management structures that developed. Indeed, the structure was noted by more than one participant as an important lesson in their professional lives and development.

The adoption of those project management structures and gaining experience in learning and negotiating them is perhaps the most important lesson. Indeed, that management processes were extremely productive. Interestingly, this appears to have allow the participants to focus more on the 'playfulness' of both the event and ultimate product in their publications. Despite occasional frustrations and the somewhat more well-defined structure of the group, playfulness in research and tool-building became a major theme in their later presentations and reflection.

The participants have produced many formal and informal presentations and documents. Many were avid bloggers about their experiences - most can be found in their Zotero group (<https://www.zotero.org/groups/oneweekonetool2013/items>). The range of presentations and publications speak to an extraordinarily wide audience, including the international Digital Humanities 2014 conference; Through Design, a popular design podcast; the Association of College and Research Libraries' TechConnect series; and regional technology and/or humanities conferences (see below for details, and Appendix I for a complete bibliography).

Evaluation

Evaluation of the participants' experiences was conducted via a survey in a Google form. Themes that can be seen in the survey include:

- **Collaboration** Many participants cited lessons in team collaboration, particularly as part of project management. The importance of managing communication between all members of the team and the experience in doing so is described as producing important changes in their professional lives.
- **Structure** Closely related to collaboration and communication, well-defined structure was noted as a factor in the success of the week. Interestingly, *more* structure, established both before and after the week itself, was noted as a suggestion for changing One Week | One Tool.
- **Time constraints after the week** As discussed below, the most common reason cited for the cessation of development work on Serendip-o-matic is lack of available time in the year after the experience. This is consistent with the first iteration of One Week | One Tool.

Continuation of the Project

For most practical purposes development on Serendip-o-matic is at an end, though for the time being the application will be maintained. During our reunion at THATCamp in 2014, we discussed the possibility of active development continuing. The consensus was that continuing active development was an unrealistic goal. The lack of available time was consistently given as the primary reason for this. While enthusiasm for Serendip-o-matic remained high, the reality is that everyone's professional responsibilities left little opportunity to continue development and coordination. This is not surprising, as One Week | One Tool is by design an experience distinct from 'usual' professional life, and participants in the first iteration had much the same reaction.

That said, the more fundamental part of One Week | One Tool – the development of professional skills that will be applied in working life and shared among others, appears destined to have a continuing effect on the participants and their colleagues. Occasional new presentations from the participants will expand the influence of their lessons learned. Hence, RRCHNM will continue to keep Serendip-o-matic up and running for as long as our technical infrastructure can reasonably support it.

Grant Products

Publications and Professional Development

The One Week | One Tool team has been quite prolific in their ongoing professional development work about Serendip-o-matic and the experience of One Week | One Tool. Their Zotero library of their blog posts, presentations, papers, and other recognitions contains over seventy items.

The most significant product is the long paper at Digital Humanities 2014 presented by Amy Papaelias, Brian Croxall, Mia Ridge, and Scott Kleinman. In the presentation, they reflect on the virtues of playfulness, both in the process of building Serendip-o-matic and in the product itself. They argued

in favor of the benefits for incorporating more “playful work” in the context of academic research and scholarship. As current digital humanities work relies on collaborative environments (including hackathons, maker spaces, maker challenges, etc.), opportunities like One Week | One Tool provide a space for playful work to encourage more creative risk-taking and engaging user-experiences within the context of digital humanities scholarship and practice.

Importantly, they included a considerations of the challenges of evaluation in their talk.

Another notable and informative post is Meghan Frazer's post in the ACRL's TechConnect series (<http://acrl.ala.org/techconnect/?p=3621>), which provides an insightful summary of the lessons learned.

Please see Appendix I for a full bibliography of resources related to One Week | One Tool.

Serendip-o-matic

The usage of Serendip-o-matic itself has been somewhat limited. The site usage statistics show that, after the initial release, visits declined sharply. That is not to say, however, that it does not continue to bear fruit. It is used as a demonstration tool not only for the One Week | One Tool process itself, but also as an example of using multiple APIs to produce research results.

Overall, though, it is important to remember that One Week | One Tool is an exercise in rapid, immersive learning about technologies, tools, development, management, and outreach in digital humanities projects. What the twelve participants achieved, learned, and - most importantly - shared with their colleagues has been a significant success.

Appendix I Bibliography of related presentations and publications

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